

**Testimony of Margie B. Gillis, President, Literacy How, Inc. and
Research Affiliate, Haskins Laboratories,
Regarding Proposed Bill 6432, An Act Concerning Closing the Achievement Gap**

March 3, 2011

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Committee, I write this testimony in support of PB No. 6432, An Act Concerning Closing the Achievement Gap. I believe that the bill can be strengthened in the following ways:

1. Although reading is mentioned in the bill, it is not highlighted as key to closing the achievement gap. Connecticut's reading scores as measured by both the CMT and the NAEP, show that little has changed in the past 20 years – particularly in the priority districts. We know from decades of research what the measurable prerequisite language/literacy skills are. We know how to assess these skills. And we even know how to intervene as early as PreK when these assessments reveal that a child is at risk. So why haven't test scores changed substantively? I believe it's because teachers and administrators alike 'don't know what they don't know.' We have to make a concerted effort to address this problem and build teachers' and administrators' knowledge about evidence-based reading instruction.
2. I suggest that the proposed bill contain specific language for the monitoring and accountability of Continuing Education Units (CEUs). All practicing teachers in the state of Connecticut are required to take 90 hours of coursework over a period of five years in order to maintain certification as an educator or to become recertified. The regulations that govern the administration of CEUs and the activities of CEU providers have not been explicit enough or enforced to ensure that teachers are learning content that will have an impact on student achievement. Likewise, the efficacy of the system has not been evaluated or monitored to ensure that the content provided in these CEU courses includes clear objectives and that educators demonstrate proficiency in the content area through an appropriate assessment.
3. Since CEUs are the currency of the practicing teacher's professional development experience, it is imperative that the State Board of Education, along with Local Education Agencies, work collaboratively to ensure that teachers are provided with the highest quality opportunities to expand their knowledge of evidence-based practices and content. If student outcomes do not show improvement with the current CEU offerings, the State board of Education should increase the 90 hour requirement to as many as 150 hours. While a quantitative increase in the number of hours may be helpful, the additional hours must include professional development activities matched to students' needs and based on what teachers are lacking in terms of knowledge and skills. There must be assurances that teachers are receiving quality training that will enhance their teaching in order to increase student achievement.
4. Finally, I recommend that the state revise it's current reading assessment requirement from the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) to a technology-based measure that can be administered, scored, and analyzed for instructional purposes quickly and efficiently. The DRA takes at least two weeks per classroom, two to three times per year, to administer. That doesn't include inputting and analyzing the data. Ten years ago, the DRA was useful in supporting differentiated, small group instruction. Today research confirms that the assessment lacks reliability, validity and utility.

Respectfully submitted,



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